

CHAPTER XVII. A NEW YEAR'S DINNER PARTY.

The 1st of January arrived, and Mr. Mitchel had heard nothing from Mr. Barnes. Inquiry at his office was met by the simple statement that "the chief is out of town." When he would be back or where a communication would reach him could not be learned. A few days before, however, a formal engraved invitation to the dinner party had been mailed to his home address. Mr. Mitchel was annoyed at not having any notification of whether or not the detective would be present. However, he was compelled to go ahead and depend upon the slight chance that at the last moment he would appear upon the scene. He hoped that this would occur, as otherwise his scheme for the evening would

The dinner was to be served at 10 o'clock that night at Delmonico's, where a private room had been engaged. It lacked ten minutes of the hour for sitting down, and all the guests had arrived except Mr. Barnes. These were Mr. Van Rawlston, Mr. Randolph, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Neuilly, who had decided to spend the winter in New York; Mr. Chauret, and several other gentlemen.

It lacked barely half a minute of 10 when Mr. Barnes was announced and ntered in handsome evening dress. Mr. Mitchel's face wore a look of triumph as he saw him, and he hurried forward to receive him. Every one present understood why the detective was invited. for it was by this time well known that a wager was to be decided at 12 o'clock. the exchange of greetings Mr. Mitchel gave the waiters the order to open the doors of the dining room, and in the moment's interval managed to get a word with the detective. "Tell me quickly, have you succeed-

'Yes, thoroughly."

"Good! Write the man's name on a card, and I will give you one upon which I have written the name of my

Mr. Barnes did so. Then they exchanged cards, glanced at them and grasped each other's hands significantly. The cards bore the same name. With the others they went into the dining room. Mr. Thauret found himself seated next to Mr. Barnes, while on the other side of the detective sat Mr. Fish-

It need scarcely be said that the dinner was enjoyable and enjoyed, though it must be admitted that all awaited anxiously the hour of 12. It will be as well perhaps, therefore, to come immediately to the denouement, for which all were assembled. The last course had been served, and coffee and nuts were on the table, when the clock chimed the hour for which all were anxious. Promptly at the first stroke Mr. Mitchel arose. There was a silence tolled, and then he began: There was a silence till 12 was

"Gentlemen, you have all kindly accepted my invitation to see me win a resh wager made 18 months ago. It is odd perhaps that I should have wonwe remember that the time was 13 months, which number, as we all know, superstitious persons are inclined to connect with misfortune. To show, however, that I do not harbor such childish ideas, I purposely made the time of that length, and tonight at the decisive moment we are 13." Here he paused a moment, and one might have

noticed that several persons quickly counted those present to test the fact. Continuing, he said: "The superstition in connection with 13 at dinner is a well defined one, and the supposition is that one of the number will die within the year. I offer as a toast, therefore, Long life to all present—who deserve The last clause, after a slight hesitation, made a decided effect. However, the toast was drunk in silence.

"As some present may not entirely understand what my wager was I must explain that 13 months ago tonight I was in a Pullman sleeper with my friend, Mr. Randolph. Mr. Barnes here had just accomplished a neat capture of the criminal Pettingill, who has since been convicted. The papers were prais-ing him, and Mr. Randolph did so to me in glowing terms. I ventured the assertion that detectives run down their prey largely because the criminal class lack intelligence sufficient to compete with their more skilled adversaries. I offered to wager that I could commit a crime within a month and not be detected within a year thereafter. The amount was to be \$1,000 and was accepted by Mr. Randolph. I stipulated for conviction, though had I been arrested within the stated period and convicted afterward I should have considered that I had lost the wager. That is why I awaited the arrival of Mr. Barnes so anxiously. I had not seen him for some time, and it was possible that at the last moment he might be prepared to arrest me upon evidence that would later convict me. However, gentlemen, I have escaped both arrest and conviction, yet I committed the crime as

You must prove that," said Mr. Randolph, "and, according to our agreement, it must have been a crime which was much talked about."

"Quite right, my friend, but I shall be able to demonstrate all that. By a curious coincidence a robbery was committed on the very night and upon the same train upon which we made our wager, while another robbery was committed almost at the moment when the stipulated month expired. Thus two crimes transpired within the time allowed me, and with both of these my name has been connected in the mind of the detective, Mr. Barnes. Now, that you all may better understand the circumstances I must go to what I might call the beginning. Years ago certain circumstances in my earlier life gave me an intimate acquaintance with the methods used by detectives, and I then acquired the idea which led me into this undertaking-that where the criminal has succeeded in escaping actual

watching during the commission of his crime, so that there is no witness to the act, the detective is almost powerless until he learns the object for which the crime was undertaken. Am I not right,

"To know the object of a crime, of course, is a great assistance, but much would depend upon the attendant cir cumstances

'True. The object then is important. From this point I reached the conclusion that if a man approached another, totally unknown to him, at night in a lonely neighborhood, struck him on the head, killing him, and then, unseen, reached his own home, it would rest en-tirely with himself whether or not he would ever be caught. I wanted a chance to try this experiment—that is, to commit a crime solely to test the ability of the detectives to discover me afterward. The difficulty was that a gentleman of honor would scarcely wish to engage in such a reprehensible piece of business. For years, therefore, I could think of no way to have my wish, till the merest chance threw the opportunity within my grasp. Waiter, fill up the

He paused a moment while this was being done. The men went around with champagne, and when Mr. Thauret was reached he asked to have his burgundy glass filled also. Mr. Mitchel was again speaking when the waiter returned with he red wine and did as requested. Mr. Barnes also presented his glass for the same liquor, saying in an undertone to Mr. Thauret, "I cannot take too much champagne.

"One of my hobbies," continued Mr. Mitchel, "as you all know, is the col-lection of jewels. A few years ago I heard that a magnificent set was offered for sale. A rich East Indian nobleman. so the story goes, had procured the gems as a present to his wife. They were of the choicest quality and of each exactly two, matched precisely in size, cutting and coloration. In time he had two daughters, twins, the mother dying at their birth. Eventually these girls grew up and were married, the ceremony being a double wedding. The father took the set of jewels and divided them, giving to each girl one of each. This greatly diminished their value, for the matching of gems adds to their price.

"Reverses of fortune tempted one of these women to offer her jewels for sale. They were taken to a Paris dealer, who chanced to be a man through whom I had made many purchases. He undertook not only to dispose of the gems, but to reproduce them with a high order of imitation, so that the woman retained the original settings and con-tinued to wear what her friends sup posed to be the genuine gems. I bought the unset stones. Subsequently her sister, learning the secret, and seeing that there was a way by which the jewelr could be retained, while the jewels themselves could be turned into money, engaged the same dealer to serve her a similar way. Of course I was doubly anxious to obtain this second lot, for by doing so I enhanced the value of those which I had already. I therefore bought! them also."

He paused a moment, to allow the company to recover from the surprise at learning that the stolen jewels were "This lot was sent to me through the

Boston custom house. I instructed the

dealer to do this because I had found that goods can be received with less delay in Boston than in New York. Being notified by my broker there that they were ready for delivery, I went to Boston and obtained them. I placed the wallet in a peculiar satchel which had been made to order for me, and carried it to my room at the Hotel Vendome. Later in the day I met Mr. Randolph. and went with him to a theater. He was to return to New York by the midnight express, and I went with him to the depot. As we stood awaiting our turn to purchase tickets you may imagine my utter astonishment to see a woman pass and board the train having my satchel in her hand. There could be no mistake whatever, because the satchel was peculiar, both in shape and color. Of course I saw at once I had been robbed. It was useless to go back to my hotel, for that would be time wasted. If by any miracle there were two such satchels, mine was safe in the hotel. I therefore astonished Mr. Randolph by offering to accompany him, and I did so, occupying the same section with

"While I was thinking what action I should pursue, knowing that once the train started my thief would be safe as far as New Haven, Mr. Randolph began



"He had my satchel."

came to me that this was my chance. would rob the thief of my own property. Thus if caught I could not be imprisoned, while if not I would not only win my wager, but I would have the excitement and the satisfaction for which I had wished. One thing threatened to upset my plans. Mr. Barnes by an odd chance came aboard the same coach, was given the section next to ours and overheard our conversation. This of course I could not have counted

"You did take it into your account, though." interrupted Mr. Barnes

a listening detective? True, but I had no idea that this was so. It was merely extreme precaution, and only shows that we can never be too cautious in an endeavor to keep a secret. Later, however, I heard you get up, and peeping through the curtains I saw you sitting up or rather lying in a berth opposite, with the curtains drawn. I at once supposed that you must be a detective. My companion was soon asleep, but with \$100,-000 worth of jewels in the balance I could not sleep. I was busy wondering what I should do. I think, though, that I must have dozed, for I know that I was startled to discover suddenly that we were not moving. I looked out of our section window—fortunately I was next to it—and found that we had run into the depot at New Haven. Like a fish it came to me that the thief might leave the train here. I was about to get up, when to my astonishment I noticed

"You mean that I refused to tell Mr. Randolph what I meant to do, eaying that I might be overheard, and that I might even be talking for the benefit of

a man sneaking along by the side of the train. I was on the side opposite to that from which the passengers would alight, and the suspicious actions of the man forced me to watch him. He passed so close to me that I could have touched nim had my window been open, and as he did so the light of an electric lamp disclosed the fact that he had my satchel. The thief had been robbed already. The man approached a coal bin, and stooping shoved the satchel behind it. Then he returned to the train and

"I said to myself: 'That fellow is an artist. He will remain on board till the robbery is discovered, if necessary, and even allow himself to be searched. Then he will quietly come back and get the satchel and jewels.' Thus it was my one to act quickly. But if I left the train I knew that the detective would see me. I therefore gently raised the sash and deftly let myself to the ground out of the window. I quickly took the satchl, ran to the end of the depot, and ound a place where I could shove it far under the platform. Then I climbed back into the berth, and after that I as-

The company applauded this description of how the robbery had been committed, and Mr. Mitchel bowed.

"Wait, my friends; we are not through ret. The woman who had robbed me had the supreme audacity to report her loss, or perhaps we should say that she was so angry that she became desperate. I have reason to believe that she had an accomplice in this man, and that suspecting him of robbing her she would have been willing to give testi-mony against him if caught and trust to escape herself by turning state's evilence. When we were ranning in to New York, Mr. Barnes directed that all should be searched. I enjoyed that, I assure you. It seemed so amusing to look in New York for what I knew was n New Haven. At the same time I was anxious to get back to New Haven as quickly as possible. With that end in view I invited Mr. Barnes to breakfast with me. I tried to make it appear that I was anxious to have him agree to be the only detective on my track, but in reality I wished to discover whether he would be able at once to place a spy at my heels; that is, whether he had a an at the Grand Central already. This found was the case. I therefore was obliged to go to my hotel as though having no desire to leave town again. Then subsequently I eluded this man by the convenient bridges across the elevated railroad. I went to New Ha-

ven, found the satchel, and then deposited it at a hotel near by for safe keeping. My object in this was plain. I the newspapers, and that by behaving suspiciously at the hotel—of course, was disguised—attention would be attracted there. This did happen, and the result was that the jewels were given into the custody of the police authorities, the very safest place for them, so far as I was concerned. Gentlemen, that is the story of the crime which I committed. I have only to show my receipt from the Boston custom house and my bill of sale from the Paris dealer to be able to recover my property. Are you satisfied, Mr. Randolph?"

"Entirely. You have won fairly, and I have a check for the amount with me, which you must accept with my con-

gratulations upon your success."
"I thank you very much," said Mr.
Mitchel, taking the check. "I take this because I have immediate use for it, as you will learn directly. Now I must tell you the true story of the other rob-

At this all were very much astonished. Mr. Thauret appeared a trifle nerv-ous. He placed one hand over the top of his claret glass, and let it rest there a moment, after first having taken a sip

"You all recall the fact that I was sick in Philadelphia," continued Mr. Mitchel, "at the time of the Ali Baba festival. I flatter myself that that was the most artistic thing that I have done throughout this whole affair. Any one seeing me would have been satisfied that I was truly ill, yet, in point of fact, my cough was brought on by drugs administered to me by my physician at my express desire, and for purposes which I had explained to him. I guessed that I had been followed to Philadelphia and took care that I should not be too closely watched, as Mr. Barnes knows. Yet I expected that after the affair Mr. Barnes himself would come to Philadelphia to see me, and my artificially produced illness was to baffle him. But I am anticipating events. After the train robbery the woman was murdered. By what seemed an odd chance she was in the same house where my wife then lived. I knew that I had nouse on the night of the murder. I knew that other circumstances pointed strongly to my guilt. But I had the advantage over the detective, for I knew that the man who had stolen the jewels from the woman, not finding them when he returned to New Haven, mus have been furious. Judging the woman by himself, he would suppose that at least it was possible that she had taken them from the satchel herself. Then on that slim chance might be not have returned to the woman, and, admitting the theft of the satchel, have endeavored to make her confess that she still had the jewels? Failing in this, might he not either in a fit of anger or to pre vent her from 'peaching,' as they call it, have cut her throat?"

"You are wrong there, Mr. Mitchel," said the detective. "The woman was killed while she slept. There was no

going into the house and stilling he that he might search for the sema indisturbed, and also to rid himself of a companion for whom he no longer had any need. At least, that was the view that I took of it, and, more than that, I felt convinced that the view has the view that I took of it, and, more than that, I felt convinced that I knew the man."

At this moment Mr. Thauret nervon ly reached forth his hand toward his glass of wine, but before he could get it Mr. Barnes had taken it up and drained it to the bottom. Mr. Thauret seemed livid with wrath, and a dramatic incident occurred, unobserved by the rest of the company. Mr. Thauret turn-ed toward Mr. Barnes and seemed on the point of making a demonstration when that gentleman just tipped back his chair slightly, and meaningly exposed to the view of his neighbor the gleaming barrel of a revolver, which he held in his hand below the table. This only occupied a moment, and immediately afterward both men seemed, like the others, simply interested listeners to the narrative.
"When I say that I thought that I

knew the man," continued Mr. Mitch-el, "I make a statement which it may interest you to have me explain. In the first place, I saw the fellow who hid the satchel at the New Haven depot. Still I obtained but a momentary glimpse of his face and would not have been sure of identifying him. I will call your attention now to the fact that very slight incidents sometimes lead the mind into a suspicion, which, followed up, may elucidate a mystery. Prior to the train robbery I had met a man at my club one night, or rather I had seen him playing a card game, and I conceived the notion

that the fellow was cheating.
"Within a few days of the robbery I met this man again, on which occasion Mr. Barnes was present, and an interesting conversation occurred. I was standing aside, pretending to be other-wise engaged, but really puzzling over the face of this man, which now seemed to me strikingly familiar. Of course l had seen him at the club, yet despite me there was an intuitive feeling that I had seen him elsewhere also. In a moment I heard him admit that he had been aboard of the train on the night of the robbery, and that he had been the first one searched. Awhile later he of-fered to wager Mr. Barnes that various theories which had been advanced as to the thief's method of secreting the jewels were all erroneous. This one remark satisfied me that the thief stood before me. I had not then heard of the mur-

der. Now it must be remembered that I was insnared in the meshes of circumstantial evidence myself, so that, besides any duty that I might owe to society, it became of vital importance to my own safety that I should be in a position to prove this man guilty. I formed a rather bold plan. I made a friend of the fellow. I invited him to my room one night and then accused him of having cheated at the card game. He at first assumed a threatening attitude,

but I retained my composure and perhaps startled him by proposing to form a partnership by which we could fleece the rich clubmen. I hinted to him that I really possessed less money than I am credited with, and that what I did have I had taken at the tables on the continent. He then admitted that he had a system,' and from that time we posed as good friends, though I do not think he ever fully trusted me. I learned from him that his partner in the game where I caught him cheating was entirely innocent and made him promise not to play with him again, for I had liscovered that the detectives had been told of this game, and therefore knew that they would be watching both men when playing cards. I therefore pre-

'Having somewhat won the fellow' confidence, I was ready for my great scheme in baffling the detective so that might win my wager and at the same time entrap my suspect. I had conceived the Ali Baba festival. I showed Mr. Barnes one day the ruby which I after-ward presented to my wife. At the same time I told him that if he should come to the conclusion that I was innocent of the train robbery, he might as well re-member that I would still have to commit the crime as agreed upon. Then I arranged that the festival should occur on New Year's night, the very day on which my month would expire. I knew that all this would lead the detective to believe that I meant to rob my fiancee, a crime for which I might readily have escaped punishment, with her assistance. There he misjudged me. I would not for treble the sum have had her name mixed up in such a transaction. She knew absolutely nothing of 'my in-tentions; though being at that time in ignorance of the details of the train robbery, I left her mind in a condition not to offer resistance to the thief, who she might suppose to be myself. Then, after laying my trap, at the last moment I baited it by asking my fiances to wear the ruby pin in her hair. I went to Philadelphia, and feigned sickness. Then I eluded the spy and came on my self. Mr. Barnes I supposed would be present, and I had arranged that if so he would necessarily be in one of the dominos of the Forty Thieves. I had invited my suspect to assume the role of Ali Baba, but he shrewdly persuaded some one else to take the costume, himself donning one of the Forty Thieves' dresses. This compelled me to go around speaking to every one so disguised, and to my satisfaction, by their voices, I discovered my man and also Mr. Barnes. In the final tableau Mr. Barnes, who evidently was watching Ali Baba, attempted to get near him, and by chance was immediately behind my man. Fearing that he would interfere with my plans, I fell in just behind him.
My design was to tempt the fellow to
steal the ruby, which, if he did, would
satisfy at least myself that my suspicions were correct. It was perhaps a mad scheme, but it succeeded. I had so arranged that every one should pass the sultan and make obeisance. In doing this, as my flancee was seated on the fleor, the ruby in her hair would be just at hand, and one who knew its high value could easily take it. I fully expected my man to do this, and I saw him gently withdraw it. Immediately Mr. Barnes stepped forward to seize him, but I held the detective from behind, then threw him into the advancing crowd, and, in the confusion, escap-ed from the house."

Mr. Mitchel paused, and silence pre-vailed. All felt, rather than knew, that a tragedy might be at hand. Mr. Thauret, however, in a moment said: "Are you not going to tell us name of this sneak thief?"

"No." anickly responded Mr.

street is now considered, this me would be counted 'a bold operator.' confess that I admire him for his com age. But it would scarcely do for me to mention his name, when I am not in guilty man."
"I thought you said that you saw
him steal the ruby?" said Mr. Theuret
"I did, but as I myself had been sas

pected of that my unsupported word would be inadequate. Let me tell you what I have done in the matter since. The most important step for me perhaps was to prevent the sale of the gem. This was not difficult, as it is known the world This was not difficult, as it is known the world over. I warned all dealers and let my man know that I had done so. Next, I wished to delay a denous-ment until tonight, the time when my wager with Mr. Randolph would be settled. I soon discovered that my suspect would not be averse to a marriage vith a rich American girl. He quescioned me adroitly as to the fortune which would come to my little sister-in-law, and I replied in such a way that I knew he would bend his energies in that direction. Then I did that which perhaps I should not have done, but I It myself master of the situation and able to control events. I made a wager with Dora that she would not rer

should neither accept nor reject a suit-or. I also told her, though I declined to fully explain how, that she would materially assist me in winning my wa-This explains what Dora meant when she asked Mr. Randolph if money would count with him against her love. When she accepted the wager with Mr. Mitch-el, she had been feeling resentful to-ward Mr. Randolph, who, as long as he suspected his friend of the graver crimes, hesitated to become connected with him by marriage. This made him less attentive to Dora, so that she had not thought of him as a suitor when making the bet. When he declared himself, she rec-

ognized her predicament and was correspondingly troubled, yet determined to win, and so acted as related.

By this time, though Mr. Mitchel had not mentioned the name of the criminal, several present knew to whom he was alluding. Mr. Randolph said

impetuously:
"Then that explains"— Here he stopped, confused.

"Yes," said Mr. Mitchel, smiling. "that explains everything that has per-plexed you. Be reconciled for the time you have been made to wait, for you will now not only win the lady, but will recover this check, for I must pass it over to her as a forfeit. Gentlemen, shall we drink to the health and snoess of Mr. Randolph?'

This was done in silence. The guests felt a constraint. They knew that more was yet to come and anxiously waited

Mr. Mitchel continued: "Gentlemen. that ends my story, except that I engaged Mr. Barnes to take up the threads of evidence which I gave him and to disentangle them if he could. Shall we hear his report?"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]



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